

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE, ITS AIMS AND METHODS

Black Mountain College is a co-educational liberal arts college with a student body of between seventy and a hundred and a faculty of twenty. It is also a functioning community. Several important features distinguish it from the conventional American college, while at the same time it pursues the essential aims of liberal arts institutions.

One main difference is that the fine arts are equated as a field of study with the sciences, languages and literatures, and the social sciences. Students are expected to qualify in all these four fields before they are permitted to specialize in one. Most colleges offering the B.A. or its equivalent require some work in a science, but few require experience in the arts. The arts offered at Black Mountain are music, painting, drama and dancing, work with material, architecture, and weaving. These are studied in their theoretical and historical aspects as well as from the point of view of craft. But their larger contribution to a student's education is that the arts, like literature, social studies, or the sciences when widely conceived, are treated as a focus for many aspects of life. Hence they become a discipline equal in scope and significance with the three conventional divisions of the curriculum. There are other media of communication than words or mathematical formulae, and other repositories of human experience than books. It is the function of the teacher of an art to enliven the student's understanding in his particular medium, to the end that he will not only see and appreciate but perhaps learn to use this medium to some small degree for his own communication and expression. The aim is not so much to produce artists as to develop an understanding of the worlds and the languages with which the various arts have to do.

Many American college students sing or play instruments, but they are not often encouraged to play the world's great music as a natural pastime or to enjoy it in informal concerts as a normal form of entertainment. Acting, writing, and even painting are not unknown to the American undergraduate, but usually these activities have a marginal position in collegiate life; they are extra-curricular, or are studied in courses attended primarily by the special student, or they are cultivated by cliques of self-conscious individuals who flatter their own egos and are mildly condemned by the more virile, sociable, and intellectual. Under these circumstances the arts as a subject for serious and general study do not flourish in most colleges. At Black Mountain, however, they take their more proper